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Who Saves The Hero

by CamelotQueen

Summary

May brings home her new boyfriend. Something about him makes Peter feel nervous, but he makes May happy. And if May's happy, then Peter is happy.

Then it escalates.

Notes

I wrote this based on an idea that shesellsseagulls from tumblr had and it REALLY got away from me. I did not intend for it to be this long... but here we are. This is practically her brainchild that I just gave birth to, so all credit goes to her for the idea and for being my very first beta reader. :') Thanks for reading it over a million times and making it way better than what I originally wrote.

See the end of the work for more notes

The first time May brings her new boyfriend home, Peter feels weird about it. She’s gone on a couple of dates since Uncle Ben died, but none that she brought home to introduce to Peter, so he knows it’s more serious.

The man, James, seems nice enough. He’s tall and broad shouldered, his hair is styled back and he’s wearing a sharp outfit—he and May had just gotten back from a date at an expensive restaurant. He has a good job as an accountant for a big firm, so he could easily afford to pay for

both May and himself. May had met him online, and the sparks had flown from there.

He smiles and shakes Peter's hand. "Strong grip you have there, Pete," and Peter laughs nervously. He feels a strange tightness in his chest when he sees James straighten up and wrap an arm around May's shoulder, like Uncle Ben used to do. He feels strangely possessive of her in that moment, but he swallows the feeling down.

"Your aunt has been dying for me to meet you, Pete," James says, and Peter feels weird about the nickname when he never even talked to the guy before.

Aunt May laughs. "Finally, the two important men in my life are introduced to each other!"

Peter smiles. He makes eye contact with James and his expression makes him feel uneasy. He smiles with all of his teeth. He almost looks like he is sizing Peter up. Peter feels a prick of his Spidey senses flaring up on the back of his neck.

This is the start.

—

May is having James come over to watch Peter while she picks up an extra shift at work.

"Come on May, I'm almost sixteen… I don't need to be *babysat."*

"Hey, don't give me that. I still never feel comfortable about leaving you in the apartment by yourself, even though I know you can handle it," May says from the bathroom as she puts on her makeup. "Besides, I think it would be good for you two to have some boy time. We've been dating for almost three months now and you two have barely gotten to know each other! I need to fix that."

Peter groans. "Please don't call it *boy time."*

"I'm sorry," May exits the bathroom. "Man time. Whatever you want to call it."

She leans down and kisses Peter's forehead. He sullenly accepts her hand pushing his hair back and stroking his cheek.

"Hey listen," May says and pauses until Peter looks her in the eye. "I know he's not the same as Ben. I don't expect to ever replace him, so don't think that's what I'm doing."

Peter feels like shit. He didn't mean to make May feel guilty for dating.

"I know that," he says quickly.

"I just want you to know that your opinion means the world to me," May explains. "I want you to like him too. So get to know him, I'm sure you two will get along great."

Peter smiles at her. May's life has been tough since Ben's death. Between being a single working mom, finding out her nephew is a super-powered vigilante, and trying to get along with Stark after learning he kept it all a secret from her, she's barely had any time to move on from her husband. She has been more active in restarting her love life lately, and Peter doesn't want to take that away from her just because he's too stubborn to see her with another man. He would try for her.

He nods. "Alright, May. I'll give him a shot."

"That's my little man," May beams and kisses him again. "I'm so proud of you."

There's a knock on the door a few minutes later. May opens it and James is there.

"Oh, just in time! Thank you *so* much for coming over, James!"

"No problem, honey," James replies. He turns to look at Peter over May's shoulder and his smile turns forced. "Hey there, champ."

Again with the nicknames.

“Hey James,” Peter responds.

May looks back and forth between them. “Okay… I gotta go. You two have fun now, okay?”

“Sure, May,” Peter promises and gets up from the couch to hug her goodbye. She gives him a kiss and then turns to James to give him the same treatment. Peter averts his eyes.

“I love you,” he hears her murmur to him and he’s glad he turned away so they can’t see his eyes widen. So they really are *serious.*

“Goodbye!” May says one last time before closing the door.

The apartment is enveloped in silence in her absence. Peter looks to James, waiting for him to say something.

“So, uh…” James starts, scratching his neck. “What do you like to do, kid?”

Peter feels annoyance bubble up in his chest. He doesn’t know why he’s so bothered by the nicknames, Tony calls him kid all the time.

“I, uh, well I’m on the decathlon team at school.”

“What’s that, like science shit?” James wrinkles his nose.

Peter shoots him a look of displeasure at the jab and James’ smile falls. “Yeah,” he says flatly. “Science shit.”

They both stand there awkwardly at the door.

“That’s cool,” James says, breaking the silence. “Do you like sports?”

“Uh… sometimes,” Peter lies. Truthfully, he couldn’t care less about them. It’s kind of hard to idolize football players when he can stop a bus with his bare hands.

“Oh, Petey, don’t tell me that. You watch the Jets? A game is on tonight, we should watch it together.”

“Uh… sure, I guess,” Peter responds. He doesn’t really want to, but James looks like he’s trying so Peter will sacrifice a night to boring TV. Besides, if it’s a chance to get to know May’s new boyfriend, he’ll take it. He knows how badly May wants them to get along.

Do it for May, he reminds himself.

James smiles. “Great, I’ll order pizza.”

—

May asks how their night went and Peter says it was great. Truthfully, it was kind of awkward. He was hoping it would be a chance for him and James to talk, but James mostly just watched the game. It made Peter feel slightly out of place. He spent the night sneaking texts to Ned from the other side of the couch.

But the way May smiles when he says James was nice makes it all worth it. She deserves to have a boyfriend and Peter doesn’t want to stand in the way of that. Besides, it isn’t like James is a bad person, they just don’t have that much in common.

Peter tells Ned all about it at school the next day.

“Oh man, is he like one of those guys that like shouts really loud whenever the team has a good play? My dad screams so loud that we get complaints from the neighbors.”

Peter shrugs. “I don’t know, he was kind of quiet, but I feel like that was because I was there. It was just really weird… like it was so tense the entire time. I feel like maybe he doesn’t like me?”

“Why wouldn’t he like you?”

“Um… because I’m skinny and nerdy and don’t like sports?”

“But you’re *Spider-Man,”* Ned says a little too loudly.

“Shh! He doesn’t know that!”

“All I’m saying is that you’ve only hung out with him once, and without May as a buffer. It’s gonna be awkward. Once you get to know each other more it’ll probably be fine.”

Peter grimaces. “Yeah, you’re probably right.”

“And if he *does* end up being a total douche, just tell May how you feel.”

“I can’t do that, Ned. She looks so… happy. I don’t want to disappoint her.”

“Well, you can always come and bitch about him to me if you want to,” Ned offers.

“Thanks, man.”

–

May is having James over for dinner. Peter helps her clean up even though James has seen the apartment before and sets the table while she prepares the meal. She’s making chili, James’ favorite.

When James comes over, May’s face lights up. Peter watches from the kitchen as they exchange kisses and May takes James’ coat. She looks so happy. Peter takes the coat from her arms and brings it to her room. He stays there longer than necessary so they can have a little time alone and shoots Ned a text to let him know that James has arrived and to wish him luck, and then goes back into the kitchen.

May turns around to look at him when he arrives and he doesn't miss the way James' face falls. *Maybe I should have left them on their own for a little longer…* he thinks to himself and then sits down at the table.

"Don't you think you should help your aunt bring the food over?" James asks critically as soon as he does, and his ears burn in embarrassment.

"Oh, of course, I…" he stammers.

May laughs. "He's just not used to being a host, it's okay."

Peter gets back up and grabs some bowls off the counter to bring to the table. James sits down and nods approvingly when Peter sets everything out in the middle.

"Wow, thank you, Peter," May says. "It's nice to have some help around here."

"You mean you have this young man living with you and you do all the work?" James asks.

Peter feels embarrassed again. "I help out," he defends himself.

"Yes he does," May sits down and leans over to wrap her arm around him. "He's very good."

Peter feels a little better that May sticks up for him, but the bitter sting of James' implication doesn't go away.

The conversation continues and it's mostly James and May talking to each other. Every once in a while May will try to get him to join in by bringing him up.

"Did you know that last year Peter's decathlon team won Nationals at DC?" May says to James, pulling Peter out of his thoughts.

"Oh yeah, he mentioned to me that he competed," James muses.

“Yeah, they’re really good! Right Peter?” May asks.

“Oh, uh yeah… though technically I didn’t compete at Nationals, so…”

“But he’s still really smart,” May brags.

James hums, obviously disinterested in Peter’s pursuits.

A few minutes later, May excuses herself to use the bathroom. As soon as she’s gone, James is glaring at him.

What did I do wrong? Peter thinks. He looks down at his chili and pretends to be really fascinated with pushing it around. James doesn’t say anything, but Peter can feel his glare on him. His Spidey sense tingles in the back of his neck again.

And then May is back, and James looks up at her, and the sensation is gone. Peter releases a breath he didn’t realize he was holding and everything goes back to normal.

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“Dude, I’m serious. I don’t think he likes me,” Peter tells Ned at their lockers the next day.

“Really? Why do you say that?”

“He just looks at me *really* intensely whenever May isn’t looking. It freaks me out.”

“Damn. Did you tell May?”

“No, Ned. I already told you… I don’t want to start any drama. May’s happy so… I’m happy.”

“Yeah but like… she wants *you* to be happy too. You should just be honest with her.”

“It’s fine, Ned. I think I can handle a couple of side eyes. It’s no big deal, I’m just venting.”

“Okay, man…”

“Penis Parker!” he hears and feels his Spidey sense flare before he’s roughly shoved into a wall of lockers, causing him to drop the books in his arms.

Peter turns around to glare at Flash. He and his friends laugh as they walk by. Peter huffs in annoyance and bends down to pick up his stuff. Ned bends down to help him.

“Dude, why do you let Flash push you around like that? Can’t you, like, use your webs to make him trip or something?”

Peter gives Ned a look. “No, Ned. I’m not gonna do that. I don’t want to stoop to his level.”

“Yeah, but he’s *so annoying,”* Ned whines. “Can’t you at least, like, stop him from pushing you around?”

“I can’t use my powers, it’s too dangerous,” Peter explains. “He’s been doing this to me my whole life, he’ll notice if I all of a sudden get really strong. I don’t want to take any chances.”

He shrugs. “And besides, I use my powers to fight bad guys and criminals *only* . And that’s all in my suit. I’m still not even really sure what the extent of my powers are. The last thing I wanna do is accidentally hurt Flash trying to defend myself.”

Ned doesn’t look convinced by Peter’s logic. “Okay, but if you *do* get back at him someday, I’ll pay you five whole dollars.”

Peter laughs. “Okay, Ned.”

The bell rings and they go their separate ways for class.

–

A month goes by and Peter starts seeing a lot more of James. One day he comes over with a duffle bag and stays the night and he leaves without it the next morning. May spends a couple of nights at his place too, but more often than not they stay at May's apartment. May explains that she doesn't want to leave Peter alone all the time and feels safer knowing where he is. It makes it harder to go out as Spider-Man when James is at the apartment, though.

James doesn't seem to like when Peter is in the apartment whenever he stays over, though. He's always trying to get May to stay at his place instead or go out.

When May invites Peter to tag along with them when they go out, James smiles and says *"that's a great idea* ," but sends Peter glares whenever she isn't looking. So Peter more often than not rejects the offers, claiming to have too much homework.

Once summer arrives it gets harder to find excuses, and he's around more often, so he spends a lot of time at Tony's lab.

He doesn't tell Tony much about James. He just tells him that May has a serious boyfriend. Tony says *"good for her"* and doesn't really comment further. Peter is happy to talk about things like Spider-Man and science instead. He always enjoys Tony's company and he feels safe around him. Peter distantly wishes that May had found someone more like him instead.

"What's up, Pete?" Tony asks one day that Peter is hiding out in the lab after an argument with James. "You look glum."

Peter shrugs, focusing on the project he's working on. "Nothing, just a little stressed."

"Stressed?" Tony says incredulously. "It's summer. What do you have to be stressed about, kid?"

Peter smiles at Tony's tone.

"Well James is kinda pressuring me to get a summer job but no one will hire me because I'm so young and all summer positions have been filled, so he's kinda mad at me."

“A *job?* Kid, aren’t you a little young? Most places won’t even hire you until your sixteen.”

“Yeah, that’s why it’s been so hard. But he wants me to start contributing more, and I don’t really disagree. Aunt May struggles a lot, I feel like I should be helping.”

“But isn’t that what he’s there for? Do you need this ‘internship’ to turn into a paid position? Because I can make that happen.”

“No! Mr. Stark, I didn’t mean to imply…”

“Peter,” Tony sighed. He only used his name when he was being sincere. “It’s no skin off my back. If you need some money, I can help out. I can set it up as a real job if you feel like you need to earn it. Lord knows you help out in my lab enough that you might as well be my personal assistant.”

“Mr. Stark, I…” Peter doesn’t know what to say.

“You have enough to worry about as Spider-Man,” Tony waves his hand. “You don’t need more responsibility. So just tell that James guy and your aunt that you got a job at Stark Industries.”

–

James doesn’t believe that Peter scored a job at Stark Industries as a paid intern halfway through the summer. But May just nods knowingly and says that Peter has connections and that he did an unpaid summer program there before. They haven’t yet brought up the fact that Peter personally knows Tony Stark and routinely goes to visit his lab, and Peter is grateful for that. May still isn’t a huge fan of Tony Stark, but she says she’s proud of Peter for getting the job anyways. She tolerates him spending so much time at his lab, but now he will get paid for it so she can’t argue with that.

He still keeps his concerns about James from her, mostly because she seems blissfully oblivious to the tension between them. The glares have persisted but that’s all they are. Peter has mostly learned to ignore them despite the niggling warning it flares in his Spidey senses.

It all comes to a head one Saturday night when James is staying over for the weekend but May decides to go run some errands by herself.

“No, stay here,” May insists to James when he tries to come with her. “I’ll only be around an hour. Just stay with Peter, I’ll be back soon.”

Peter’s head shoots up from the book he’s reading on the couch. He doesn’t like being left alone with James, so he’s avoided it since their first night. James looks equally displeased at being left alone with Peter, but he hides it behind a smile.

“Okay, sure,” he says and May doesn’t seem to notice the strain in his tone. She kisses him and and says a quick *“be good”* to Peter, then she’s out the door.

Once she’s gone, James looks at Peter like he’s just been left a huge burden, and Peter ducks his head back behind his book. He tries to be as quiet as possible so that James will just leave him alone and go about his business.

James sighs a long suffering sigh and heads to the kitchen to pull a drink out of the fridge. He settles down on the couch opposite of Peter and the drink fizzes open. Peter expects him to turn on the TV and watch a game like he often does, but the apartment remains silent.

“You know, you could make more of an effort to be around less,” James drawls after a long swig.

Peter puts his book down in surprise. “What?”

James examines the label of his can. “Me and May have been talking about it. It’s a real pain in the ass to date when your kid is hanging around all the time.”

“Oh.”

Peter doesn’t know how to respond. *May said that?*

“Don’t you have any friends to hang out? You know, other than that one kid that always hangs around here and leaves LEGO’s everywhere.”

“Ned?”

“Yeah, him. Anyways, you should join a team or something. Make some friends, get out of the house a bit more. You’re practically sixteen for Christ’s sake, you shouldn’t still be having your aunt doting on you. When I was your age, I was hardly ever home. Kids are such a headache, my parents probably thanked me for it.”

“I… didn’t know. Sorry?”

“I don’t understand why you’re her problem anyways, you’re not even technically related to her. You were her husband’s problem, but he’s gone now.”

Peter feels his eyes sting at such a casual mention of Ben’s death. He looks away quickly. He used to be self-conscious about taking up May’s and Ben’s time when he was younger and they first adopted him. He obviously wasn’t expected and he felt like a burden. But he had gotten over that a long time ago. Now he feels those feelings creeping back.

“I’m sorry, that was harsh,” James backtracks. “All I mean is that I didn’t exactly sign up to live with a teenager when I started dating your aunt, you know what I mean?”

Peter nods like he does, but he really doesn’t.

“So do me a favor and... whatever it is you do when you’re not home—build paper mache volcanoes, hang out with your nerdy friends, whatever—just… do more of that.”

Peter nods again, feeling like he lost his voice. He feels numb with the shock of the confrontation. He already knew James didn’t like him, but this is the first time he actually said something to him.

By the time May comes back, Peter has sequestered himself in his room and locked the door.

–

After the first confrontation, James gets more bold. He’s at the apartment more often than he isn’t and whenever May isn’t home, James’ politeness disappears. He tells Peter what a nuisance he is to be around and that if he had to be stuck dating a woman who lived with her nephew, he could at least be *helpful.*

So Peter starts to make an extra effort to not be home. He stays out late patrolling most nights and starts making a habit of staying at Ned's house. Once school starts up again, he does his homework in the library, claiming it helps him focus better.

Peter tells Ned what James told him.

"Peter, oh my god, what? He can't just say that to you! You have to tell May!"

"No Ned, it's fine, honestly. He was just… letting off some steam, I guess. Him and May are like… *super* into each other. Like, it's gross. Like the other day…"

"Peter, stop," Ned interrupts him. "I know what you're doing, you *always* do this. You feel guilty about Ben, so you're trying to make it up to May by putting up with her shitty boyfriend so she can be happy."

Peter blinks and steps back.

"Come on, man," Ned insists. "Don't do this to yourself."

"I…" Peter shakes his head.

"Just promise me you'll bring it up to May?" Ned pleads. "I think it'll help."

Peter pauses, biting the inside of his cheek. "Okay…" he relents, sighing. "If there's an opportunity to, I'll tell her…"

"That's all I ask," Ned replies, patting Peter on the shoulder.

–

Peter is kind of hoping an opportunity wouldn't arise, but as his luck would have it, May brings

James up when they're alone a few weeks later.

"So, have you and James been getting along?" she asks nonchalantly as she sets a mug of tea down on the coffee table in front of him. She sits down on the couch with her own mug and blows on it gently.

Peter thanks her and straightens from his curled up position. "Yeah, he's cool," he says before remembering what he promised Ned. "I mean… it's just..."

He trails off and May furrows her eyebrows. "It's just what?"

"I don't know," Peter mumbles. "He just… makes me kind of uncomfortable sometimes? I don't… really like that he's here all the time. I just feel like this is all happening so fast…"

And there it is. May's expression morphs into guilt and sadness and that's *never* an expression Peter wants to see on her.

"Oh Peter…" May puts her mug down on the table and leans over to put her hand on his knee. "I don't want to make you uncomfortable. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to make this seem so rushed, I just… *really* like James."

"I know," Peter says quickly. "And I don't want to take that away from you. Just forget I said anything."

"Peter," May says in her disappointed voice. "I don't want you to feel like you can't talk to me. Especially about stuff like this. I know things have been tough after Ben… I just thought maybe having a male influence around the house would make you feel more at home. But I can talk to James…"

"No," Peter jumps up. "No, no, no May, *please* don't say anything. I was stupid to bring it up."

"Now wait just a minute—"

"May *please.* Promise me you won't say anything to him."

May looks at him like she's trying to analyze him. Peter puts on his best puppy dog eyes.

"I won't say anything to him if you don't want me to," May says finally. "But I can make sure he's at the apartment less."

"You don't have to do that—"

"Peter, you will *always* be my first priority," May says, cupping his cheek. "Okay? Never be afraid to tell me these things. I won't be mad."

But that's precisely *why* Peter is afraid to tell her these things. She's never mad at him and she will always choose him over herself. Peter doesn't want her to do that. He doesn't want to be the reason she's unhappy.

Instead, he nods and makes a silent promise to himself to make sure that never happens.

–

After their talk, May keeps to her word and James starts staying at the apartment less. Peter feels relieved, he forgot what it was like to come home and let his guard down. Everything is good for a few weeks and even though Peter is guilty that May is spending less time with James now, he can't bring himself to regret it.

One Saturday afternoon there's a knock at the apartment door while May is out working an extra shift. Peter isn't expecting anyone, but he goes to answer the door anyways. When he opens it, James is on the other side looking rather pissed.

"Oh, hi James," Peter greets. "May isn't home right now."

"I know," James says darkly and strides in.

Peter is startled by his words and closes the door, looking at him in confusion. "Did you leave

something here…?”

“No, I came to talk to you, actually.”

Peter feels his heart beat fast in his chest. “Me?”

“Yeah, listen… did you say something to your aunt?”

“What?”

“Did you say something to her? About the things I’ve told you? She’s been really weird about me staying over the apartment suddenly. And she’s mentioned you ‘ *not being ready,’* whatever the hell that means.”

“Oh…” Peter swallows. “I, uh, I don’t know. We just talked about… you know. I didn’t say anything bad…”

Peter feels himself panic under James’ intense glare.

“Listen,” James punctuates the word with a sharp point. “I don’t need you inserting your little opinion into me and May’s relationship. Things were going great until you stepped in and made May feel all guilty about being close to someone. Is that what you want?”

“N-no, I—!”

“You know, she’s had to sacrifice a lot for you. She never even wanted kids, but now she’s stuck raising you by herself. And you’re just being selfish and trying to keep her for yourself.”

“No.” Peter’s mouth feels dry, so he licks his lips. “No, I’m not trying to do that. May would never say that.”

“She told me about how tough it is to raise you. How hard it is to do it alone… and then when she finally has someone to help her, you push me away.”

Peter feels anger flare up in his chest. “Well it’s not exactly like you’ve been helping her! You’ve barely talked to me since we met!”

“Oh, you wanna be mouthy now, huh?” James steps forward. “Don’t even try, kid. I’ve dealt with much worse shit than you ever will. You’re just a spoiled brat who can’t stay out of grown up business.”

“You have no idea what me and May have been through!” Peter argues.

“Oh yeah?” James challenges. “May’s told me everything. She told me how you started staying out late and not answering her calls. How she’s had to call the police multiple times because she thought you were missing. She told me how your Uncle Ben went out looking for you the night he was shot, because you were out past curfew again and didn’t give the courtesy to call them to let them know where you were—”

“Shut up!” Peter shouts tearfully.

James eyes widen manically and Peter feels the hair on his arms stand up before the man even raises his arm. He sees the hand descending down and before he can even think, he’s dodging out of the way.

James’ hand swings uselessly at the air and for a moment there is silence. James seems to realize what he just tried to do and looks incredulously at Peter. Peter stares back in shock, breathing heavily. *He tried to hit me,* he thinks to himself, dumbfounded.

Then, he thinks: *oh my god I moved too fast.* James stares at him in wide eyed confusion. Peter’s face feels white hot with panic. He used his Spidey senses to dodge the blow before it happened. He wasn’t thinking, he just reacted.

Something snaps in James’ expression and he rushes at Peter. This time, Peter forces himself to stay still. *Don’t fight back,* he thinks as he squeezes his eyes shut. James grabs the front of his t-shirt and pushes him against the wall. Peter feels the hard wall smack against the back of his head and James’ breath in his face.

“Don’t *ever* talk to me like that again,” he growls. Peter looks up at him with wide eyes. “May is *mine,* you got that? If I catch wind that you say anything bad about me again, I will make your life

hell. ”

He releases Peter with one last violent slam against the wall. Breathless from the shock, Peter sinks to the floor. He looks up as James adjusts the collar of his shirt and reaches for the door.

“Don’t tell May I was here,” he says simply before he leaves.

The door closes behind him and Peter is left in the suffocatingly silent apartment to process what just happened.

–

He doesn’t tell May about that night. He doesn’t tell Ned, and he doesn’t tell Tony either. There are ample opportunities to tell any of them, but then he thinks of James’ words and he falters. He never meant to make May miserable or get in the way of her happiness. If James made her happy, even if he made Peter nervous, he would deal with it. Besides, it’s not like he even really *hurt* him. He didn’t even give him a bruise. He’s faced much worse going up against the baddies of Queens. Peter is stronger than him, he has to remember that. There is nothing James could do to seriously hurt him.

Peter wondered if James would try something like that again. It came on so suddenly and ended so quickly that he had half a mind to believe it never really happened at all. When he thinks about it, he feels embarrassment burn at his cheeks. The way he just let James push him up against the wall like he was nothing… Peter had felt so *helpless.* He had let someone physically overpower him.

But it’s just like Flash. He has to let him think he had the upper hand or else it would become too suspicious. He has to keep up the act that he is just a regular kid that can’t feasibly defend himself against a grown man. If it happens again, and Peter shudders to even think of the possibility, he has to keep his powers in check.

Another part of him doesn’t want to tell anyone because he doesn’t want them to know. They all know he’s Spider-Man, that he could’ve stopped him, but he didn’t. There is no pity for a kid with super strength that lets an average guy slam him into a wall.

So he tries to hide it, but May senses that something is wrong, the way she always does.

“What’s wrong, sweetie?” she asks when she comes home and Peter is uncharacteristically quiet. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, fine,” he lies.

Ned senses that something is up too, and so does Tony, but no one is able to figure it out, and Peter doesn’t tell them.

No one knows the truth, and Peter intends to keep it that way.

–

May and James celebrate their six month anniversary with a night out. Peter is relieved to have the apartment all to himself. He decides to go out on patrol since they aren’t expected to be back until late and it’s been a while since he’s had time to do a night shift. He suits up and heads out.

“Hey, Karen,” he says as he hears the AI booting up.

“Hi Peter,” she responds kindly. “How was your day?”

“Eh, it was alright,” Peter swings from rooftop to rooftop. “Say, are you detecting anything on your feeds?”

“Not right now, I’ll alert you if anything comes up.”

“Aye aye, captain.”

Peter swings around for a while, just letting off steam, until he finally runs into something.

“It looks like two adult males accosting a young woman,” Karen quips helpfully.

“Thanks, Karen,” Peter says and then springs into action.

After that, it seems like there is plenty of crime to keep him busy that he loses track of time. By the time he wraps up an attempted car break-in, he finally thinks of maybe calling it a night.

“Hey Karen, what time is it?” he asks casually.

“2:30 AM.”

“Oh *shit.”*

Peter didn’t realize it was *that* late. May and James were definitely home and were probably wondering where he was. Peter feels a stab of panic at the thought.

“Okay, uhhhhh… don’t break into cars again! It’s bad!” he hastily chides his victim, who is currently webbed to a lamppost, before shooting a web at the nearest building and heading straight home. He considers sneaking in through the window but now that May knows he’s Spider-Man, she doesn’t like when he sneaks in anymore. And besides, if James is there, he doesn’t want to risk getting caught coming in through the window in his full suit.

Front door it is, he thinks to himself as he crawls into an alleyway to deactivate the suit.

He sneaks into the apartment as quietly as he can, opening the door slowly so it doesn’t make a creaking sound, but it doesn’t matter because James is sitting on the couch in the living room when he enters.

“Peter,” he says calmly. “Where have you been?”

Peter freezes. “Oh I was just, uh, you know…”

“Do you have any idea how worried your aunt and I were? We tried calling you and you didn’t answer your phone. That was very irresponsible of you, Peter.”

“Weren’t you the one who wanted me out of the house in the first place?” Peter rolls his eyes. He knows he shouldn’t, but he can’t help it.

James shoots out of his chair. “What did you just say?”

“I said I’m sorry, it won’t happen again,” Peter sounds insincere and he knows it.

James starts walking slowly towards Peter. “Somehow, I don’t believe you. Not when May has told me it’s happened before.”

James is close enough to stare down at Peter. Peter holds his ground, even when he feels his Spidey senses telling him to run. He knows it’s coming, but he doesn’t do anything when James’ hand comes down on him and slaps him across the face. Peter winces and cups his cheek. Honestly, it barely stings… he’s had worse hits from bad guys, but he feels his eyes water all the same.

“Maybe next time you’ll reconsider staying out so late and worrying your aunt half to death,” James threatens. He sneers down at Peter and then turns around.

“Now I’m going to bed. I’ll let your aunt know you’re home, but you’re grounded for a *week.* We’ll talk more about this in the morning.”

Peter wants to shout after him *“you’re not my dad!”* but he doesn’t. Instead he stands frozen in his spot, cupping his cheek.

–

Peter’s phone and laptop are taken away. He isn’t allowed to be in contact with Ned or Tony, and he’s not allowed to leave the apartment unsupervised. May looks concerned, she’s never punished Peter so severely before and she knows he was out late because of Spider-Man, but James insists that he needs more discipline.

Peter feels trapped in the apartment, like it’s a prison instead of a home, and James is the prison guard. Even when they’re at work, Peter is too scared to leave and risk James finding out, the memory of the night he was caught branded in his mind. Instead, he bides his time and waits for the week to be up so he can get the hell out.

May corners him at one point when James is at work and apologizes for his extreme reaction.

"He's never had to deal with a teenager, I don't think he's used to the sneaking around. But he's right that you can't keep doing this, Peter. Maybe next time you'll think twice about forgetting your phone when you go out on patrol."

Peter pulls away when she tries to pet his hair. He feels bad for giving her the cold shoulder, but he feels spiteful. She's the one that brought James into the house. Everything was perfect before that.

"Is everything okay?" May asks after a beat of silence. "I know I promised you that he would be around less… but I think you might have to start getting used to him. We're really serious now, Pete, and I'm thinking of asking him to move in with us *permanently.* Is that a thing that you're going to be okay with?"

Peter whips his head up and looks at her with wide eyes.

May sees his reaction and purses her lips. "I know he's a bit stricter than I am, but he's trying his best to be a father figure to you."

A *father figure?* Peter doesn't need a father figure, he already has one. He thinks absently of Tony Stark and their late nights in the lab and teasing banter.

"Peter?" May asks after he's silent for a while.

Peter swallows down his nerves. "If that's what you want, I'm fine with it," he chokes out. "I'm glad you're happy."

"Are *you* happy, Peter?" May asks. "Remember I said that he can never replace Ben, and I meant that."

"I know," Peter nods slowly. "It's okay, May. I'm happy if you're happy."

May smiles back at him and gives him a hug, and he ignores the sinking feeling in his stomach.

–

James moves in, and Peter spends the day with Tony.

They tinker in silence, Peter's brain filled with thoughts of what's going to happen now that James is living with him full time. With May working unpredictable hours and James and Peter getting home from work and school at around the same time, there's a lot of potential for lots of alone time with him. Peter doesn't want to think about what that's going to be like.

"Okay, let's take a break," Tony says after they work in silence for two hours. "Tell me what's on your mind."

Peter puts down his tools and cocks his head at his mentor. "What do you mean?"

"Something's been eating at you, kid. Don't think I haven't noticed. You've been quiet this whole time… which is extremely unsettling because usually you're not quiet at all."

Peter shrugs. "Everything's fine, it's just that James is moving in today."

"James, May's boyfriend? Oh, that's good… isn't it?"

Peter shrugs again, keeping his eyes off Tony. "It's okay, I just… I don't know."

He can feel Tony's gaze on him, processing his answer. "Is it weird?" he asks.

Peter looks up at Tony. "Yeah, I guess. I don't know… I just wish…"

He doesn't finish his thought, he just lets it hang there in the silence. *You should tell him,* his mind supplies, but he quickly snuffs it. He can't tell *Iron Man,* his hero, that he can't handle a little slap. It feels silly, suddenly, to be so bothered by it, when he knows that Tony has gone through much, much worse.

“It’s fine,” he amends, looking away again.

He focuses back on his project, the break over, and works again in silence. Tony stares at him for a few more seconds and then gives up, turning back to his own work. His eyebrows are furrowed like he’s trying to work out a difficult problem, but he doesn’t seem to be concentrating too hard on whatever he’s working on. Peter thinks that’s the end of their conversation until Tony hesitantly speaks up again.

“Hey, kid? Would you wanna help me with this project I’m working on? I’m trying to figure out how to incorporate nanobots into my Iron Man armor so that I can create an easily portable, regenerating suit.”

Peter’s head whips up. “You want me to help you with Iron Man?”

Tony shrugs, quirking a satisfied smile. “Well, only if you’re helpful. How familiar are you with nanotechnology?”

“Not at all,” Peter answers truthfully. “But I’m willing to learn.”

He scoots his stool closer to Tony’s station and Tony looks pleased. “Heh, thought so,” he chuckles and raises a metal device in his hand. “See this? I’m making a containment pod for the nanobots that can be easily released and formed into a suit on command.”

“It looks like the arc reactor,” Peter notes, staring at it closely.

“Precisely,” Tony points his screwdriver at him. “But this time it’ll be removable. I wear this, I have access to an Iron Man suit at all times.”

“Sweet,” Peter smiles.

Tony explains him what he’s discovered so far and what problems have arisen along the way. Peter does his best to contribute hypotheses and solutions, which Tony seems to appreciate. He seems impressed, even, that Peter is able to give suggestions with his limited knowledge on how the technology works.

They work together until it's time for Peter to go home and the sour mood he began the day with is completely dissipated. No longer is he worrying about James moving in, but he feels giddy with contentment. He just helped *Iron Man* start building a new *suit* , that was the coolest thing he's ever done. He mentally high-fives his ten year old self.

Tony's mood seemed to have lightened as well. He smiles easily and offers Peter a book on nanotechnology for some *"light reading."*

"You really have a knack for this stuff," he says as he hands it over. "Here's what I used for reference, let me know if you get any ideas from it."

Peter takes it like he's been handed the most precious jewel. "Wow, thanks," he breathes. He puts it in his backpack and zips it up carefully.

"Oh, and Peter?" Tony says before Peter walks out of the compound. Peter turns around.

"If you ever need me, kid, I'm right here."

"Thanks," Peter nods. "I know."

–

May and James are in an argument.

Peter knows it can't be good, because May storms out of the apartment. He doesn't know what they're fighting about, but he silently hopes they break up, and then immediately feels guilty about it.

James has been living with them for a month now, and it's been unbearable. At least school has started up again so it gives him more time out of the house, but he has a strict curfew of 11 PM now and has to make sure he's home by then or else he's grounded. And being grounded means being forced to stay in the apartment that he can't stand anymore. So he tries his best to be home at 11 PM every night but gone up until then.

Unfortunately, it's currently 11:30 PM, Peter is in his room studying, and May has just stormed out.

Peter can feel his heart racing and he tries to ignore it. Did he remember to lock his door? Maybe if he's really quiet, James won't…

He hears a knock at his door. "Peter, open up."

Peter freezes. Maybe he can just pretend he's asleep…

"Peter, *open the door,"* James sounds like he's getting angrier, and that won't do. Peter scrambles out of his seat and unlocks the door. Maybe if he can appease him…

As soon as the door is open, he's being pushed back into his room. He stumbles on his feet but catches himself and watches James as he closes the door behind him.

"Your aunt is mad," he explains, as if Peter didn't just hear the epic shouting match outside his door. "This is all *your* fault."

He doesn't explain how it's Peter's fault, it's just understood. Everything that happens is always Peter's fault.

He pushes Peter again and then grabs his hair, yanking his head back. Peter yelps in pain, grasping at the hand but it doesn't relent.

"Look at me," James demands and Peter forces his eyes to open. James stares down at him with such intense hatred that it makes Peter's blood run cold. "Listen closely, we're going to go out this weekend, and you're gonna come back and tell May that you had a *great* time, do you hear me? I don't want to hear any more of this bullshit about missing your Uncle Ben. She better not leave me just because *you* can't get your shit together."

Peter's breath quickens. He doesn't feel like Spider-Man like this, with James' hand in his hair and spikes of pain shooting through his skull. He just feels like a helpless sixteen year old kid. *I could kick him off of me,* he reminds himself. *I could send him across the room.* But he doesn't.

“Promise me,” James seethes, yanking Peter’s hair harder.

Peter yelps. “I promise!”

“Good,” James releases his hair with a shove, and this time Peter does lose his footing. He collapses against his desk chair and the impact hurts. There will definitely be a bruise on his hip where it made contact with the corner. “Remember, if you’re not convincing enough, there will be a round two of this.”

James leaves the room and Peter curls up on the ground, trying to control his breathing, wondering when he started to feel so weak.

–

That weekend, James does actually take him on a day out. Peter wishes he would have just pretended to and they could just go their separate ways, but James oddly seems like he’s genuinely trying to have a good day with Peter, which confuses him. It’s like a few days prior never happened, nor any of his other outbursts.

He takes him to a movie, which is good because then they don’t have to talk for two hours, even if it’s a boring movie, and then they go get ice cream. He takes him to his favorite ice cream shop, so he’s sure James asked May what they should do before he left.

They sit in awkward silence at a booth while Peter stabs his ice cream repeatedly with a spoon.

“Are you gonna eat that?” James asks after a while. “Or are you just gonna keep poking at it?”

“Oh, uh, sorry,” Peter says and puts a spoonful in his mouth.

“If you didn’t want an ice cream, you could have just said so,” James says irritably. “I wouldn’t have wasted money on it.”

“No, it’s good,” Peter says quickly, grabbing another spoonful. “Thank you.”

He finishes it quickly after that, and James snorts in approval. They get up to leave. Once they're in the car and buckled up, James puts a hand on Peter's shoulder and squeezes tightly.

"Remember what I said, Peter," he warns when Peter looks at him. "Tell your aunt we had a great time."

Peter nods, the sudden switch from indifferent James to intense James rendering him speechless.

When they get home, May is there watching TV.

"Oh, you're back!" she exclaims, muting the program. "How was it?"

Peter glances over at James who's staring at him with a warning in his expression, and he turns back to May and forces a smile.

"It was great!" he says, and he can feel bile rise up in his throat. "We had a great time!"

"Oh awesome, what did you do?"

"The movies and then ice cream, he took me to my favorite place."

May smiles fondly at James and he smiles back. "Well isn't that great to hear? I'm so happy that you boys are getting along."

Peter nods and smiles, but it feels wrong on his face and he wants to just go into his room and disappear.

–

Tony calls him after school.

“Hey kid, how’s it going?”

“Oh, uh, it’s alright, how about you?”

“It’s fine. Listen, kid, I’ve noticed you haven’t been logging many hours as Spider-Man recently and I was wondering what was up with that?”

“Oh, uh,” Peter adjusts the phone in his grip and looks around to make sure no one is near him. “It’s just… James is really strict about curfew and he doesn’t know, so it’s kinda hard to sneak out of the house…”

“Oh man, that’s tough. Have you considered telling him? Do you trust him?”

“No,” Peter answers immediately. “Definitely not.”

“Woah there,” Tony says. “Okay then, just a suggestion.”

“Sorry,” Peter apologizes.

“Don’t worry about it. Hey, if you ever need to use the internship as an excuse, don’t be afraid to throw me under the bus. As long as it’s okay with May,” he adds.

Peter smiles. “Thanks, Mr. Stark. Um… is there a reason you called me?”

“Uh, that *is* the reason I called,” Tony replies, sounding confused.

“Oh,” Peter says, dumbfounded. It’s very rare that Tony calls and if he does have something to tell him, usually it’s relayed through Happy.

The line is awkwardly silent for a few seconds. “Uh, should I not have called? I just had a free second and I knew you were out of class and figured I’d ring you up before I forgot,” Tony sounds *defensive.* That’s a first.

“No, no,” Peter quickly says. “It’s fine. Thanks for calling! I just figured it was something about the, um, internship or something.”

“Oh,” Tony says. “No. But… we’re still up for this weekend, right? Did you read the book I gave you?”

“Most of it,” Peter replies, smiling. “I’ve jotted down some notes, I’ll go over them with you when I get to the compound.”

“Sounds good,” the conversation eases back into friendliness, and Peter is relieved. “See you then.”

–

Peter and Ned are almost finished watching *The Mummy* when Peter’s phone alarm goes off.

“Oh shit,” he murmurs. “I gotta go.”

“Oh come on,” Ned whines. “There’s like fifteen minutes left, at least stay until the end.”

“I can’t,” Peter says, getting up and grabbing his stuff. “I need to make sure I’m home before 11.”

Ned sighs and pauses the movie. “Seriously, man? This is so not cool. You used to be able to stay over super late.”

“Yeah, that was before James moved in.”

Ned rolls his eyes. “Okay, I’m just gonna say it: that guy seems like a real asshole. Things have been so different since he started dating your aunt.”

Peter stops moving around and lowers his head. “You have no idea.”

Ned's voice softens. "Hey… is everything okay? I feel like there's a lot you're not telling me."

Peter looks up at him and forces himself to smile. "Everything's fine."

Ned doesn't look convinced. "Okay dude, you promised me after the whole Spider-Man thing that you would stop keeping secrets from me, but if there's something you feel like you can't tell me… something that's real bad, I hope you can at least tell an adult."

Peter keeps his smile plastered on his face. *Ned knows,* he thinks. *Ned must know.*

"Dude, what do you think is happening here? I'm *Spider-Man.* I have everything under control," he lies.

Ned doesn't answer his question, but he doesn't have to. He just looks at Peter sadly and he looks vaguely disappointed in him. It makes his heart clench in his chest.

"Sometimes things are too big even for Spider-Man. That's when you need an adult."

Peter doesn't know how to respond to that, so he doesn't. They just stare at each other in the dark, the light from the paused TV lighting up the sides of their faces.

"I gotta go, Ned," Peter says, and he's out the door before Ned can even say goodbye.

–

Peter doesn't even know what sets James off this time. He's not sure he even needs a reason anymore. All he knows is that both May and James are out, not together, and Peter is taking advantage of the empty apartment to catch up on some homework he's been falling behind on due to his avoidance of said apartment. It's starting to show in his grades, and he knows that can't happen if he wants to get into MIT. SATs are right around the corner, and he can't afford to slip now.

That's when he hears the front door slam and muttered swearing coming from the living room. *James.* He wasn't expecting him to be back until later, and he sounds angry. Peter tenses, shutting his math book quietly and keeping an ear out. He hears keys jangle and furniture scuffle, and then there's silence for a second.

"Peter!" he calls out finally. "Are you home?"

Oh god, Peter thinks. *Please no.*

"Peter, come out here right now!"

Peter doesn't want to come out. He wants to hide, he wants to slip out the window and disappear. But then James is opening his door *damn it, he forgot to lock it* and glaring inside angrily.

"Peter, you come when I call."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Come out here."

Peter obediently sits up and follows James into the kitchen. He points to the sink, full of dishes.

"What is this?"

"I'm sorry… I was trying to catch up on studying… I was gonna do them before you got home… I wasn't expecting you til later—" Excuses poured out of Peter's mouth.

"I don't want to hear it," James interrupts. "I don't get it. You're here all day and you can't even do the simplest chores. What's the point of having you around?"

Peter feels anger prickle under his skin. It isn't *fair* that James gets to push him around like this. He knows he should just apologize and do what he's told, but he feels his frustration take over.

“What are you talking about, it’s not like I’ve been doing nothing all day! I’ve been studying my ass off because I never have time to anymore! Not since *you* moved in.”

Peter expects the slap, he doesn’t even need his Spidey sense to predict it. But he holds his jaw steady and fixed James with a glare. The man looks slightly shocked at his lack of a reaction.

“Watch your mouth,” he says anyways, pointing at him.

“What, are you gonna hit me every time things don’t go your way? Is that it? Are you *that* convinced that I’ll never fight back?”

James actually looks scared by this. Peter feels like he has the upper hand for the first time in their relationship. He relishes in it.

“You’re *not* in charge of me.”

Peter feels his Spidey senses flare and he braces himself before James grabs him by the jaw and slams him back into the wall. He sees stars burst across his vision and James grips his jaw so tightly that his mouth opens reflexively. He lets out a sound of pain and it sounds pathetic in his own ears.

“So you think you’re tough shit now, huh?” James spits. “You think you can do and say whatever you want and get away with it? Well guess again.”

The hand on his jaw relocates to his neck and squeezes. Peter gasps but there is no air. His eyes water and he chokes, his fingers flying up to claw at the hand gripped around his throat.

He is so shocked for a few seconds that he does nothing. He thinks *oh god he’s actually trying to kill me* before his survival instincts take over and he uses his super strength to pry the fingers off and shove James across the room.

He hears the sound of glass shattering and a shout of pain but he doesn’t stop to look. He dashes to his bedroom and manages to lock his door just in time for James to slam into it from behind and jiggle the handle.

“Open up, Peter!” he shouts. *“If you don’t open up right now, you’ll regret it!”*

Peter gasps and tries to regain his bearings. He runs his fingers through his hair as the dizziness fades and looks around his room. He feels at a loss. With James pounding on the door and May not expected to come home until late, he feels well and truly stuck.

He glances at himself in the mirror and winces at what he sees. He steps forward to get a closer look. Fingerprint bruises mark his neck, his jaw, his cheeks. He looks pathetic. Tears well up in his eyes so that he can no longer see his reflection.

What do I do ?

“I’ll break down this door, I swear to god!” James yells, the bangs getting more aggressive.

He has two options. Open the door, or let James break in.

Unless…

“Sometimes things are too big even for Spider-Man. That’s when you need an adult.”

“If you ever need me, kid, I’m right here.”

Peter has half a second to make up his mind before he grabs his suit, shimmies it on, and presses the chest as it shrinks down to his size. He grabs the mask and his web shooters and looks back at the door one last time before opening his window and jumping out into the brisk night air.

—

By the time he reaches the compound, the bruises are already gone. He has finally gotten his tears under control halfway through the trip, and he is breathing easier. *It’s okay, he’s okay.*

He knocks on the front door self-consciously, not sure if anyone can hear. He has never shown up unannounced before, and he suddenly feels very shy.

The door opens, but no one is there. Peter hesitantly steps inside and it closes behind him.

“Boss is in the lab,” a mechanical voice announces.

FRIDAY. Right.

“Uhh… thanks.”

Peter walks himself to the elevator and presses the button that leads him to the lab. He mostly knows his way around the compound by now.

As he gets closer he starts to fidget. *Will Mr. Stark be mad that he showed up? Is he busy? Maybe he shouldn’t have come here…*

But then the elevator doors open and Tony is hunched over a table right in front of him. There’s no turning back now. He takes a deep breath and steps into the lab.

“Hey, kid,” Tony greets, smiling. “What brings you here?”

He takes in Peter’s suit, his pale face, and his grim expression, and his smile drops.

“Woah, Pete, rough patrol?”

He walks over to Peter, whose mask is trembling in his hands.

“I’m fine,” he lies. “I was just… wondering if I could work with you for a little bit?”

Tony looks at him critically for a moment and Peter does his best to look unassuming. Then Tony

shrugs.

“Sure, I could use a lab partner.”

“Great,” Peter smiles, but he thinks it probably looks fake. Tony lets it slide anyways.

“Alright, kid, it’s kind of getting late, but I’ll show you what I’m working on now.”

Tony moves back to the table and gestures for Peter to follow, so he does. They both lean over the project as Tony explains what he is trying to do. Peter lets his mind wander to a place he feels safe: the world of science. He listens to Tony and makes some of his own comments. Tony lets him handle some of his tools. He loves working in Tony’s lab. There’s nowhere else he could ever dream of getting his hands on equipment like this. Everything is so high tech and state-of-the-art, it’s quite literally the lab of his dreams.

They work in contented companionship for a few hours. Peter feels his mood lifting as the time passes. He’s fine, he’s with Tony, and everything is okay. He feels safe here. He’s thankful that Tony let him come so late without any questions.

While Peter is screwing in a bolt, Tony makes a big show of looking at his watch and yawning.

“Man, it is getting late! Don’t you think you should look into getting home soon, kid?”

Peter’s good mood immediately sours. “Right now? Can’t I stay just a little bit longer?”

“Sorry kid, not that I mind, but isn’t your curfew 11? It’s well past 11 now, my friend.”

Peter feels himself begin to panic. “Can I just… stay here for the night?”

Tony’s eyebrows furrow. “You’re welcome to, kid, as long as it’s okay with your Aunt May and James.”

“It’s okay, they’ll be okay with it!”

“Hold up, kiddo. Can you call them and check for my peace of mind? I kind of feel like I’m harboring a fugitive teen right now.”

Peter doesn’t say anything.

“I’m not… am I?”

Peter takes a deep breath. “Everything’s fine, really. It’s just that James is kind of mad at me right now and I’d rather just stay here for the night and maybe it will be okay in the morning.”

Tony looks like he doesn’t entirely believe that answer, but he nods. “Okay, so you’re hiding from him here? What’d you do, break their favorite vase?”

“Forgot to do the dishes…” Peter mumbles.

Tony smiles in amusement. “Ah yes, the dreaded chores.”

Peter shoots him an annoyed look. “So can I stay here or not?”

Tony looks like he’s considering. “Hm, that depends.”

“On what?”

“Will your aunt kill me if I let you?”

“No!” Peter says quickly. “I promise, she won’t mind. I can call her! But don’t make me call James too.”

That contemplative look is back on Tony’s face. “Okay, deal.”

“Thank you, Mr. Stark,” Peter sighs in relief. “Thank you so much.”

He quickly exits the lab to call May and let her know he’s staying over at the compound. Luckily, she’s working the night shift and so has not come home to hear anything from James yet, so she says yes, but she’s not very happy about it. She doesn’t like Peter spending too much time at the compound. Peter thanks her and hangs up and heads back into the lab.

“All set!” he announces, holding up his phone. “I called her and it’s all good!”

“Alright,” Tony concedes. “You win this round. I am now the guy that hides teens from their angry dads.”

“He’s not my dad,” Peter replies with more bite than he means to.

“Woah, pushed a button,” Tony raises his arms. “My bad, not there yet. Stepdad? Or, if he’s dating your aunt, is he technically your step uncle?”

He knows Tony is trying to make jokes to lighten the mood, but it doesn’t work. “He’s not my *anything.”*

Tony looks uncomfortable. *Great,* Peter made things awkward right after Tony generously let him stay the night.

“I’m sorry,” he immediately apologizes. “I didn’t mean to… I shouldn’t have…”

“Hey, kid, it’s alright.”

A silence passes over them that Peter doesn’t know how to escape from. He’s made things weird, and now Tony is going to be suspicious, he should have just went along with the joke…

“... Well, I’m not really tired. If you wanna keep working…?”

Peter blinks and then his expression slides into a smile. He doesn’t know if he’s ever been more

relieved in his life for a change of topic.

"Yeah, me neither," he admits. "Let's work."

They slide back into an easy routine—a pattern of passing tools and making comments strictly related to what they're working on. Peter thinks he's in the clear. *Don't talk about it,* he tells himself over and over again. *If you talk about it you'll ruin everything.*

Peter thinks that Tony has forgotten about the awkwardness until he speaks up while typing something on his tablet. "So what brings you here tonight?"

Peter looks up from the microscope he'd been looking through. "Huh?"

"Why'd you come here tonight?" Tony repeats.

Peter scrunches his eyebrows together. "'Cause James is—"

"Because James is mad at you, I know," Tony finishes. "I mean why *here?* Why not, say, your friend Ned's house? It's certainly a hell of a lot closer. And you've never dropped by unannounced before. Not that I mind, just curious."

"Oh, uh…" Peter feels flustered again. *Because I wanted an adult* isn't something he wants to admit out loud. Tony has no claim to him and has enough responsibility to worry about some kid's well being, but he was the only adult Peter could think of other than May.

He shrugs. "I felt like working in the lab."

It's partly true. Keeping his hands and brain busy always help distract Peter from his problems.

"Uh huh," Tony says, unconvinced, but luckily he doesn't push it further.

Only a few minutes later, Peter's phone buzzes. It's past one in the morning. Peter looks at the caller ID from where his phone rests on the table. *James.* His hands tighten into fists.

Tony glances over casually after Peter stares at his buzzing phone for a few seconds. “You gonna answer that?”

Peter shakes his head. “No.” He hits decline.

Tony raises an eyebrow but says nothing. Peter goes back to work but then his phone buzzes again. *James.*

“I think you should really answer that,” Tony says. “He might be worried about you. Maybe May forgot to relay the message.”

Peter silences his phone. “It’s fine,” he says weakly.

A voicemail is left. Peter puts his phone in his pocket.

Peter tries to focus back on his work but Tony is staring at him now. He pretends to ignore him, but it’s hard to work when he can feel the attention on him.

“Not to pry,” Tony starts slowly. “But even if that guy isn’t your *‘anything,’”* he quotes from earlier, “shouldn’t you still answer his calls? Maybe he’s trying to apologize.”

Peter huffs out a dry laugh. “Doubt it.”

Tony is silent again. He’s still staring, like he’s waiting for Peter to crack.

“Peter, look at me,” he demands eventually. Peter doesn’t at first, but then he feels compelled to. Reluctantly, he meets Tony’s eye.

“Be honest with me,” the man sits back in his chair. “Do you not like this guy?”

Peter has to laugh. “Uh… not really.”

“Yeah, I can relate,” Tony sympathizes. “Dads can suck.”

“He’s not my—”

“Yeah, yeah, he’s not your dad, I know,” Tony waves a hand at him. “But he’s filling that role, yeah? And he’s doing a bad job at it?”

“You can say that.”

Tony squints at him and fiddles with his pen.

“Can you stop that?” Peter snaps.

“Stop what?”

“Stop looking at me like that, like I’m a puzzle you’re trying to solve. I’m not one of your equations.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Tony sits up. “I didn’t mean to give you that impression. I just… something’s wrong, kid, and you’re not telling me.”

“I’m fine,” Peter seethes.

“Yeah, you’ve said that,” Tony points out. “But you’re not.”

“Okay, maybe I should just head to—“

“Why don’t you *really* want to go home, Peter?”

The question catches Peter by such surprise that he stumbles in his attempt to turn around and book it out of the lab.

"I told you… James is mad at me," Peter explains quickly.

"Uh huh," Tony deadpans. "What does he do when he's mad that makes you so scared of him?"

Peter is taken aback for a second before his face hardens. "It's none of your business."

Tony quirks an eyebrow. "Evasion isn't a good look on you, Peter. Come on… answer the question."

"He…" Peter licks his lips, his anger dissipating under his nervousness. "He yells a lot."

"Okay…" Tony nods at him to continue.

"He says mean things to me."

"What kind of things?"

"Like…" Peter tries to get his emotions under control, but they suddenly feel like waves beating against a dam. "Like that I'm a burden on Aunt May, how I make their lives difficult."

Tony's eyes darken. "And you don't believe that, do you?"

Peter shrugs.

"And does he do anything else, Peter?"

Tony keeps using his name, he never uses his name, and he keeps talking so *slowly* , like he's speaking to a wounded animal. It makes Peter's breath hitch, and he breathes faster to try to stop the tears he feels surfacing.

He's staring at Tony's chest because he can't look him in the eye and a hand lands on his shoulder. Tony ducks his head to try to look into his eyes but he keeps them steadily trained ahead. The tears are there now, in his eyes, and he doesn't know why he feels so vulnerable under Tony's gaze, why his resolve is suddenly cracking, but Tony's hand is so steady, his voice so gentle when he mutters, *"Peter?"* and he feels the dam burst.

"He hits me," he chokes, and the tears are streaming down his face. His breath hitches again in a sob. "H-he hits me a-and… pushes me into walls and… h-he tried to choke me."

Peter squeezes his eyes shut because he doesn't want to look at Tony's expression. He's so mortified, he finally said it aloud and his cheeks burn from it.

He's pulled into a crushing hug before he can even comprehend it's happening. One hand is steady on his back and the other is tangled in the curls on his head. He's pressed up against Tony Stark's chest and he wraps his arms tightly around him because *he needs this right now,* he needs it even if he's trying to be strong.

"I-I could have stopped him," he's full on sobbing now. "But I didn't. I never did. I'm Spider-Man but I can't even… can't even stand up against my aunt's boyfriend…"

He devolves into breathless sobs. Distantly he acknowledges Tony shushing him and running his fingers through his hair. They stay like that for a while, Tony rocking him back and forth. When he finally calms down enough to get his breathing back under control, Tony pulls away just enough to look at his face.

"Does May know about this?" he asks.

Peter shakes his head. "S-she would never let this happen."

"Then why didn't you tell her?"

"B-because… she's so *happy* … with James. I don't want to ruin that."

Tony's face falls into the most miserable expression Peter's ever seen on him. "Don't you think if

she knew James was hurting you, that would make her unhappy?"

Peter shakes his head. "That's why I can't tell her. If I tell her, her happiness is gone."

Tony closes his eyes for a moment and breathes out, like he's trying to give himself strength. He opens them again. "Peter… I think May and I would both agree that your safety is more important."

"But I *am* safe," Peter insists. "I'm *Spider-Man.* I can handle it. I fight bad guys every week, nothing he does can hurt me, not really."

"Except that's not true," Tony murmurs. "Because you're here, and you're crying, and you're scared to go back."

Peter feels so embarrassed that he pulls away abruptly.

"I didn't mean that in a bad way," Tony immediately amends. "I just mean that obviously it *is* getting to you. Even if you think you're strong enough to handle it."

"But I *am* strong," Peter insists and he sounds like a child even in his own ears.

"You are," Tony replies. "You're *so* strong, the strongest person I know. But this? Abuse can break the strongest person. There's no shame in that."

Peter winces at hearing it called 'abuse.' He doesn't want to think of himself as a victim.

"But you got *tortured,"* Peter explains. "You've been in the biggest battles and you still always come out on top. I can't even defend myself from a regular guy."

The tears are back, but they don't feel like they're choking him anymore. They just flow down his cheeks in hot streams. Tony sighs and grabs his shoulder, leading him to a chair. They both sit and Tony scoots his so he's right in front of Peter.

“Listen,” he says. “I know it seems like I’ve got it all put together because I try to put on that face for the public. But the truth is… the truth is, underneath the armor, I’m really *scared.”*

Peter looks up in shock. “Scared? You?”

Tony nods. “You bet.”

“What do you have to be afraid of?”

Tony looks up. “A lot of things. Mostly stupid teenagers with a self-sacrificial complex.”

Peter gives him a look to let him know he’s not amused. Tony huffs out a laugh and then gets serious again.

“When I was your age, I was scared of my dad.”

Peter perks up at that. He knew Tony had a strained relationship with his father, but he didn’t know the extent.

“That’s right,” Tony nods. “My dad wasn’t the best example of how to raise kids. Didn’t seem like he wanted me most of the time, I never seemed to make him proud. All I ever wanted was his attention, even if it was negative.”

Peter stared at him with wide eyes. Tony patted him on the shoulder and smiled.

“So I can somewhat relate to what you’re going through. Obviously not completely, but trust me: keeping it bottled up is not going to help at all. You were right to come to me.”

“But Aunt May can’t know,” Peter says. “If she finds out—“

“She’ll kick his ass out? You bet she will.”

“But that can’t happen—!”

“Why not, Peter?”

“I told you!” Peter exclaims. “If he’s gone, she’s not happy anymore!”

“How about this: she can get a new boyfriend. What if he starts hurting her too, Peter? Have you thought about that?”

Peter freezes.

“This is the cycle of abuse. They get you to trust them, and they slowly get worse. Do you think he’s going to be satisfied with just hurting you? What if they get in a fight someday and he loses control? He’s a sick man, Peter. He’s not above hurting the people he loves.”

Peter feels his face go white. He hadn’t thought about that.

“That can’t happen,” he whispers.

“You can prevent it, Pete,” Tony says. “By telling your aunt. You would be a hero.”

Peter swallows. “I’m scared.”

“I know,” Tony looks at him with sympathy. “But you’re brave. And you don’t have to do it alone. I can come with you.”

“Now?”

Tony looks at his watch. “It’s a little late right now. How about we head to bed then tomorrow, we tell her together. Does that sound like a plan?”

Peter nods numbly. In all honesty, he doesn't want to, but he doesn't want to let Mr. Stark down. Iron Man thinks he's *brave.*

"Good," Tony claps his hands. "Then it's settled, no backing down. Here, I'll show you where you can sleep."

They get up and Tony leads him through the compound. He shows him to a room that seems suspiciously set up specifically for a teenager and pulls out a set of PJs that definitely don't fit him but fit Peter perfectly. He shows him where the bathroom is and tells him to let FRIDAY know if he needs anything. Before he walks out of the room, Peter stops him.

"What is it?" Tony asks.

Without answering him, Peter runs up to him and hugs him tightly around the middle. Tony stiffens in shock for a moment but then relaxes and wraps his arms around Peter's shoulders.

"Thank you, Mr. Stark," Peter's voice is muffled by the t-shirt he's stuffing his face into.

"No problem, kid," he says quietly, resting his chin on his head. Then he adds, "he doesn't deserve you."

Peter squeezes him tighter.

—

The next day, Peter feels himself shaking as they drive back to Queens. He's wearing a hoodie and some jeans that Tony had pulled out for him and his Spider-Man suit was in a backpack that Tony told him he could keep.

Tony notices him shaking and takes one hand off the wheel to squeeze his hand.

"It'll be okay," he says. "I'll be right next to you the whole time."

They get to the apartment and Peter opens the door with a shaking hand. May and James are in the living room and turn to look at them. May smiles and heads over to give him a hug.

“How was your night, sweetie?” she asks.

Peter hugs her back and looks at James over her shoulder, noticing the bandage on his forehead and brace on his left arm. He has a moment to feel guilty about it before remembering the bruises in the mirror. Peter notices that James isn’t looking at him and May but behind them where Tony stands. He looks mortified.

“May, can we come in?” Tony asks. “Both of us? Peter has something he’d like to tell you.”

May pulls away from the hug and looks back and forth between them curiously.

“Yeah, sure. Come sit. Tony, have you met my boyfriend, James?”

Tony works his jaw and fixes James with a gaze that makes the man shrink. Peter looks on in amazement.

“I haven’t had the *pleasure* of meeting him person, but Peter’s told me *all about* him.”

The way that he says it makes James gulp. It gives Peter a little confidence to see his tormentor so flustered.

Tony reaches his hand out and gives him a shark-like smile.

“I knew Peter worked at Stark Industries,” James says as he takes Tony’s hand in a shake and grimaces when the other man holds too tight. “but I didn’t think he knew you personally.”

“Oh yes,” Tony says darkly. “Me and Peter go way back. He’s an amazing kid.”

James lets go of his hand and pulls it back against his chest, smiling nervously. Tony stares at the bandage on his head and his brace and he notices.

“Tripped coming up the stairs last night,” he lies in explanation. He knows Tony doesn’t buy it.

May looks around with a confused expression.

“Okay, what’s going on?” she finally says.

Tony puts a hand on Peter’s back. “Why don’t we let Peter explain?”

Everyone looks at him, and Peter feels panic rise in his chest with all the focus on him. Tony squeezes his shoulder in assurance and guides him to sit on the couch. May follows and sits on the couch across from them. James looks like he wants to flee but May pats the cushion next to her and he hesitantly complies.

“Peter?” May asks in concern. “What did you want to tell me?”

Peter sits with his hands between his knees, feeling every bit like he’s confessing to a crime. “Last night… I went to see Tony because… because…”

He falters and Tony pats his back in encouragement. He hears him murmur *“you can do it.”* He reaches for the bravery in himself that he didn’t know he had.

“Because James started choking me.”

“What?” May exclaims at the same time as James shouts, “Now wait just a minute here!”

“James is this true?” May turns to James with a betrayed expression.

“What? No! Are you kidding me?”

“Peter,” May turns back to him imploringly. “Was this the first time he laid a hand on you?”

Peter feels his heartbeat quicken as James fixes him with an angry glare. Tears come unbidden to his eyes. He shakes his head. “No… he’s hit me a few times… and he pushes me.”

May gets up from the couch and moves away from James as if she’s been burned. She looks at him with an expression of utmost betrayal.

“How… how could you?”

“What… you’re believing this? He’s obviously lying! Why would he just bring this up now? He’s clearly just trying to get attention.” James scrambles.

“No, you shut up! I don’t want to hear it! Peter wouldn’t lie to me.”

Peter feels a sting of guilt for that because he and May both know that he lied about being Spider-Man for half a year. But he really had put more of an effort to be upfront with her since she found out… until James.

She looks back and Peter and he can see tears in her eyes. It makes his own tears well up even more knowing that he caused them. He leans into Tony’s arm for comfort and he responds by pushing him closer to himself.

May watches them with a devastated expression and it makes Peter feel guilty so he doesn’t meet her eye. She looks instead at Tony, and whatever she sees in his expression seems to fill her with resolve. Without another word, she turns to face James.

“You,” she says with a fiery venom in her voice. “Get out of my house.”

James jumps up. “You can’t be serious!”

“Oh, I am,” she says through clenched teeth. “Get out and don’t even bother taking your stuff with you.”

“You’re *kicking me out?* That’s it? After everything we’ve been through together? Just because your nephew cried wolf?”

Tony stands abruptly. “I wouldn’t be trying to make accusations at teenagers if I were you.”

James eyes Tony warily. Tony squares his jaw and fixes James with a pointed look. “I would leave if I were you,” he says simply.

James’ eyes flash in anger. “You’ve got to be kidding me. The kid feels threatened by me moving in so he recruits *Iron Man* to try to scare me away? Seriously? And May, you think you can leave me just like that? We’re not even going to *try* to work this out?”

“I have nothing to say to you,” May seethes.

“Oh come on!” James shouts. “This is a joke. That kid has been nothing but a pain in the ass since I moved in. If anyone is the problem, *he* is! And *I’m* the one getting kicked out for it? He had everything that came for him, he’s a little bitch that doesn’t know his place and that’s because *you* coddle him!”

Tony lunges at him from across the room before anyone can process what’s happening. He grabs him by the shirt and holds him close to his face.

“Don’t talk about Peter like that,” he hisses.

Peter is stunned by his reaction. He blinks in shock and watches as Tony’s breathing becomes erratic with anger. The room is tense with silence for a moment before Tony shoves James away from him.

“Beat it,” he commands.

James looks torn between doing as he says and continuing to fight. Cautiously, he steps around Tony, who keeps his eyes firmly glued to him. He takes one last look at May to see that her resolve hasn’t changed and shakes his head.

“I see how it is,” he says bitterly. “That kid has you two wrapped around his finger. Pathetic.”

He stalks past them, throwing one last look behind him before walking out and slamming the door. May is shaking with rage and she turns to Tony, who raises an eyebrow.

“I can call my suit remotely,” he says simply.

“Will you get in trouble?” she asks.

He winks. “I wouldn’t count on it.”

May nods.

“I’ll let you and your aunt talk alone, okay?” Tony turns to pat Peter’s shoulder before pressing something on his watch that causes it to light up blue. “I’ll come back later.”

He shares one last look with May and then he’s out the door.

Once he leaves, May approaches him slowly.

“Peter, sweetie,” she asks gently. “Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I… I just wanted you to be happy,” Peter swallows, his voice not working properly. “He made you happy. I didn’t want to ruin that.”

May’s face crumbles into an expression Peter can’t understand. She kneels in front of him and grabs his cheeks.

“Peter, nothing could ever make me happier than you,” she says softly, and the tears fall down her cheeks. “Why would you ever do this to yourself for me? I don't want this. All I care about is you.”

Peter feels the tears fall from his eyes as well. May thumbs them away. “But I want you to be happy for you, not for me.”

“I am,” May says earnestly. “I’m *so* happy. And I’m proud of you for telling me this, so I can be even happier knowing you’re safe now.”

Peter feels himself lose the strength he’s had up until now. His lip trembles and he feels tears fall down his cheeks. “I’m sorry May,” he croaks. “I tried to do the right thing, but I messed up.”

May crawls onto the couch in an instant, wrapping Peter in a tight hug and shushing him gently. He presses his head against her chest, accepting the comfort.

“No, Peter, don’t blame yourself,” she whispers, running her hand through his hair. “This was not your fault. I should’ve seen the signs. I failed you. *I’m* the one who’s sorry.”

“Don’t say that,” Peter says. “I hid it from you, you couldn’t have known. Please. I just want to forget about this.”

“Okay,” May kisses the top of his head. “But you’ll have to tell me everything at some point. And we have to figure out if we’re going to press charges.”

“I think Tony is already doing enough,” Peter laughs weakly, trying to make a joke. “I don’t know what the police can do that Iron Man already can’t.”

May doesn’t laugh. Instead, she rocks him back and forth gently, lulling him into a sense of security and contentment. For the first time in a long time, he feels like he can breathe.

He knows that this isn’t over. He knows that May expects him to recount everything that’s happened, and a potential legal battle is in his future. It will be hard, but the worst of it is over. And he knows he will have May and Tony at his side the whole time.

—

Tony comes back to the apartment hours later. The sun is starting to set and it paints an orange hue

through the window. May is walking through the apartment and throwing things into a big garbage bag. There's another full one by Tony's feet as he steps in. Peter is on the couch asleep with a blanket draped over him. He spares him a quick glance before walking over to May.

When she sees him she puts the bag down and places her hand on her forehead. She sighs deeply, closing her eyes.

"What am I supposed to do now?" she asks tiredly.

"Don't worry about it," Tony responds. "I'll take care of everything."

May gives him a look that says she very much doubts that. "What did you do with James?" she asks.

Tony shrugs. "You know… I just made sure you or Peter will never have to worry about him again. He'll be staying far away from you two."

May fixes him with a suspicious glare but doesn't push the issue further. Then her face softens and tears fill her eyes.

"Are you okay?" he asks her gently.

"I feel so stupid," she whispers, glancing over at Peter's sleeping form. "I can't believe I let this happen."

"You didn't," Tony says quickly. "I know you, May. You're the fiercest protector Peter could ask for. If you had even a hint that this was going on, you would have stopped it sooner. Peter is just a surprisingly good liar."

"But there *were* signs," May insists. "I should've seen them. If I wasn't so stupidly in love…" She shakes her head.

"Hey," Tony grabs her shoulders. "You're okay. Peter will be okay. That guy? He was a manipulator. I've been fooled by them before. It's not your fault, it's his. That's what they do…

they get you to trust them. Sometimes you just judge people wrong."

May looks up at him. "He's not the only one I judged wrong." She takes a deep breath. "Thank you, Tony. You… you really helped Peter. He trusted you enough to tell you what he couldn't say to me, and I really appreciate it. You did the right thing, taking him here to tell me."

"Yeah, well," Tony pulls away and sniffs. "I couldn't let it keep happening once I knew about it."

May regards him for a moment. She seems to come to some sort of conclusion about him and nods. "I see why Peter likes you so much now."

Tony stares at her. Ever since he walked into Peter's life, May hasn't been his biggest fan. They haven't seen eye to eye most of the time and Tony has tried to steer clear as much as possible. But now, after the events of the day, with just the two of them alone without Peter, something seems to click into place—an understanding.

Tony shifts his stance and looks away. "I should probably go… I'll leave you to it."

"Oh," May steps around the garbage bag to walk him out. "Are you sure you don't want to stay a bit longer? I could make some tea."

"Nah," Tony shakes his head. "I don't want to disturb your great purge." He gestures at the garbage bags.

May looks at them helplessly. "I can't decide if I should drop them off at his house or throw them out."

"Leave that to me," Tony says. "You don't worry about anything. Just text me when you've put everything in bags and I'll come to pick them up."

"Are you sure?" May asks again, dumbfounded by Tony's generosity.

"Absolutely," he replies. "You and Peter shouldn't have to deal with that dirtbag at all anymore. I'll take care of it."

“Thank you,” May says again.

Tony takes one last look at Peter. He’s still sleeping soundly, face only just peeking out from under the blanket.

“He’s a good kid,” he says absently. “Take good care of him.”

“Of course,” May says, like it’s ridiculous that he even has to say that. And it is. He knows she will.

“Alright, I’m out,” he turns back to May. “Text me if you need anything.”

She walks him to the door and gives him a stilted hug. It’s awkward. Neither of them have ever been particularly close, but it’s a start.

“Thank you,” she says one last time.

He heads out of the apartment complex where his suit is waiting for him in sentry mode. He taps his watch to open it up and is about to step inside when he hears his name being called.

He turns around to see Peter running down the apartment steps after him. Of course the kid is awake. Tony absently wonders how much of his and May’s conversation the kid overheard.

“What’s up?” he asks nonchalantly as the kid approaches him.

“I just wanted to say thank you,” the kid huffs as he finally slows down. “For everything.”

“Don’t worry, kid,” Tony waves his hand. “Your aunt already has the *‘thank you’s’* covered.”

“But I wanted you to hear it from me,” Peter says sincerely.

Tony feels his heart flutter and a smile spread across his face despite his best attempts to stay composed. *Damn it,* this kid was going to be the death of him.

"It's no problem," he says, grabbing Peter's head to mess up his hair. "I'm glad you told me what was happening, kid. Me and your aunt just want you to stay safe."

Peter swats Tony's hand away from his head and tries to fix his hair. "I'm safe," he assures him. "Because of you. Thank you for convincing me to tell Aunt May… that was scary but I'm glad I did it."

"Of course you are," Tony presses his lips into thin line. "Now you don't have to be some asshole's personal punching bag anymore."

Peter ducks his head, clearly still embarrassed about it. "Anyways… you saved me. Again."

Tony looks at him, giving himself a moment to take in this wonderful boy who came into his life at his most desperate hour and gave him something to believe in when everything seemed hopeless. He has no idea just how much *he* saved Tony Stark.

Tony scratches the back of his head. "Don't mention it, kid. I should get going… I have a lot of stuff to do." Like getting all the paperwork in order to make sure the son of a bitch that hurt Peter gets the jail time he deserves.

"Yeah, yeah, of course," Peter stalls, looking up and down the street. Then, before Tony can turn around to get into his suit, he's pulled into another hug. He's pretty sure he's gotten more hugs in the past two days than he's had in months, but he's finding he doesn't mind. He wraps his arms around Peter and squeezes tightly.

Peter pulls away bashfully. "Bye, Mr. Stark," he says quietly. "I'll see you at the workshop on Sunday."

"Right," Tony says, nodding. "See you then."

He steps into the suit and it closes around him. The HUD lights up around him and he turns to face

Peter. He's staring at him with an expression of awe and admiration that Tony doesn't feel he deserves, but it fills him with warmth anyways.

He gives Peter one last nod before taking off into the sky. He doesn't look back but he knows Peter is watching him leave with that ridiculous starry-eyed expression.

He'll be okay. Peter is tough, and that's how he survived James' abuse for… what was it? *Eight whole months.* Tony curses himself for not finding out sooner, but that's how it always goes. There are a lot of things that he wishes he knew about sooner.

But there will be time for guilt later, when he's finished with this whole business and James is put behind bars. Because he *will* make sure the man is properly punished. He messed with the wrong kid, and now Tony Stark will have a say in making sure he doesn't hurt any kids ever again.

Tony is filled with a steely resolve to protect Peter from the worst the world has to offer. He knows, realistically, that with the lifestyle the kid chose, he can't protect him from everything. There are things that Spider-Man will face that Tony can't predict or stop.

But this? He can do something about this.

End Notes

Always remember that you do have people in your corner and to speak up if you're going through a bad situation. :')

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